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LEARNING TO PIVOT

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There I was, going through one of the most difficult periods of time in my life, and sitting in a movie theater watching a new release. A character complains that uncertainty is unfair and frankly quite scary, and another replies, "Oh, honey, that's life." This year, it seems that everything that could go wrong, did go wrong, and whenever I express this sentiment, that exact response is what I get from most people. In fact, I had never really noticed prior to this year how frequently people seem to respond to uncertainty with, "Well, that's life." Things go wrong, and people remind you that life is, frankly, uncertain, and things almost never go exactly according to any plan. Change is inevitable, and sometimes, well, it sucks. But I find that many times, the change we didn't want or didn't expect is exactly the change we needed so long as we pivot at the right moments and roll with the punches.

What do I mean by pivoting? Well, when life throws you unexpected curveballs, it's important to react to them, but how you react defines not only who you are, but can also influence the course of your life. You can choose to get hit by the ball and sulk or you can pivot around it and take a route that, perhaps, you weren't planning on originally. And sometimes it's those unplanned paths that end up leading you to the most welcome—even magical—destinations imaginable.

When I get those curve balls and need to pivot, I find that collecting my thoughts in meditation and using that personal time to regroup is essential for me. It's not easy. If something devastating or even just mildly irritating and unforeseen happens, the last thing you want to do is take the time to sit down and find peace, but sometimes it's the most important thing you can do. I try to find somewhere comfortable to sit, preferably in a sunny or bright spot, and focus on my breath to calm down. Then, I meditate with the Expand app and use the timer tool to meditate in either Focus 12 or Focus 15. I find Focus 15 helpful when I need a detached perspective to intense current problems. I then lay out the problem in my mind. I see myself reacting to it in different ways and imagine how outcomes could go based on my reactions. Meditation can be an essential tool for planning out the grand scheme of our lives if we allow for it. You can't typically

anticipate those curve balls, but having a soft plan in place to achieve whatever you wish to experience can help you pivot toward it more gracefully.

That's why I prefer to do weekly check-ins with myself in meditation. I see the life I have as it is and visualize plans I'm considering for changes I may want to make. I continually check in on perspectives I have on my life and my worldview, and I try to make sure I'm consciously aware of what's going on around me. By doing so, I'm more prepared to pivot when things don't go my way. And meditation is, like always, a valuable tool for this.

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Resolutions Part 1: Reviewing 2023 and Releasing What Doesn't Serve You

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Can you believe that the end of the year is practically here? It seems like just yesterday we were ushering in 2023, and now here we are about to welcome 2024. Perhaps my favorite thing about the end of the year is that it brings with it an air of self-reflection. It's the perfect time to review how this past year has gone, release what doesn't serve me anymore, and set intentions for the year to come. I always utilize the week leading up to the new year as a period of reflection and growth, and I encourage you to do the same if you're feeling up to it.

To do this, I set aside about 20 to 30 minutes a day throughout the final week of the year (or month if I can manage it), and ask myself the following questions:

- What did I accomplish this year? What am I most proud of?
- What happened this year that I'm not happy about?
- Did I form any habits that I'm unhappy with?
- Did I form any habits that I'd like to continue?
- What am I the most grateful for this year?
- What would I change about this year if I could?

It's important, while asking yourself these questions, to note both the good things that happened and the bad. Understand what you are happy with in your life and the positive new patterns you established over the course of the year, while also recognizing any bad patterns you may have picked up that you want to release. It's important to acknowledge the negatives so you can release them and move forward. Now, hold on to those happy patterns that you're proud of, as we'll revisit them in a future post about setting your intentions for the new year. But for now, let's talk about rejuvenating your mind and spirit prior to the new year by leaving undesirable patterns and thoughts behind.

In your self-reflection, try to scan the entire year month by month, remembering what you did at the time, and what stands out along the way. If you experienced a significantly bad period, or something bad happened to you, don't just dismiss it. It may hurt to revisit it, but processing and releasing it frees you to move forward. Live in that challenging period for just a second and ask yourself what it taught you. Did it help you grow? Did it make you feel stuck? Are you out of it now? Find one small grain of positivity in the experience (if you can) and ask yourself how you grew from that moment—even if all you can surmise is that it made you just a bit stronger in the end. As you feel into that period of time once again, breathe into it, acknowledge the hurt one last time, then slowly and methodically exhale, releasing it out of your system and into the ether, where it can no longer trouble you. Then try focusing on things that make you happy and grateful, soaking in each and every thought that makes you smile, so you can fill that space with gratitude and happiness.

Now, what if you've noticed that you've picked up a bad habit? It can be as minor as biting your nails or something potentially more problematic, such as gambling. These are very generic ideas, but they will help you get the point. If you've noticed a bad habit gaining ground, the first thing to do to release it is to acknowledge it. Then, as you meditate throughout the final weeks of this year and into the next, make it an active goal to break the unwanted pattern by recognizing that it does not serve you. As you meditate daily, put aside a period of time to envision yourself engaged in that habit you're trying to break. As you focus on it, see how detrimental it is and why it doesn't serve you. Next, envision how much better your life would be without it and the new experiences you would have without it occupying your energy and attention. After visualizing a better future without it each day, as you finish this part of your meditation, simply breathe in one final time and say, "I am releasing this unwanted pattern," then exhale it out of your life decisively, never to be let back in.

The more you actively focus on releasing the negativity, bad habits, and other things you don't want in your life, the easier it is to recognize them if they resurface in the future, at which point you can simply choose to brush them aside. Habitual patterns are seldom easy to be rid of, but when you can see the benefits of being free of them, it makes the effort worthwhile.

This end-of-year period of reflection provides an effective scan and check-in with yourself to ensure that you're happy with who you are and how your life is going. And if you're not, it can help set you on a better path. It's intended to help you celebrate the things you love about yourself, release the things you don't, and thereby rejuvenate your mind, body, and soul so you can enter the new year happier, healthier, and in a more open state. It can help you become excited to embrace the freshness of the new year. I wish you the best of luck, and a very happy and rewarding new year!

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Finding Inner Peace Amid Chaos

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I'm just going to say it: 2023 has become one heck of a year. What was supposed to be a glorious, productive year for me turned into chaos. And it doesn't seem to solely be me, either. According to universal patterns and the art of observation, it actually seems like this year has been quite difficult for many people. While the concept I'm about to share may seem simple, I think it's worth reminding everyone of this basic truth. When we find ourselves in these difficult times, it can be hard to slow down and take the time to find our gratitude and that inner peace we so desperately need. So, I'd like to remind you today of the importance, especially in times of chaos, of connecting back with your inner peace. Here's a good, refreshing way to do so. If you're looking to find your inner peace and reconnect with it, try this simple exercise. Get yourself as comfortable as possible. After all, if you're not fully comfortable, it may be hard to completely connect to that inner joy and peace. This starts with your environment. Be sure you set up a space that makes you as comfortable as possible. Think about your position, adding some extra pillows and blankets into the mix if you like. Maybe light some candles or incense that you enjoy. Make the area extra special to suit your needs.

Then, simply breathe for a bit. Focus on inhaling, feeling the breath fill your lungs. Hold it for a few seconds, then release. Really experience the exhale and how it makes you feel. Do this a few times and focus on the soft rise and fall of your chest. Finding that rhythm to your breath is a natural way to attain a sense of calmness, peace, and ease in the moment. Then, focus on your senses. What do you hear right now? What do you see? Find the small details that exist around you and pull joy from them. Do you smell those candles you lit for yourself? Did you put on some quiet, relaxing music? From there, evoke feelings of gratitude. Think about what makes you the absolute happiest in this world and focus on that joy. Feel truly and completely grateful for those things in your life. With that gratitude fresh in your mind, live in it for several minutes, just soaking in that peaceful happiness you've just created. Try to be as mindful as you can when you do this. After all, mindfulness is very healthy in times of high stress.

After several minutes, even up to thirty or forty if needed, once you feel that you can't get any calmer, begin to slowly open your eyes and notice the world around you. See your environment with new eyes from this place of complete peace and get ready to move back into your day with a refreshed and less stressed mindset.

It's normal to feel the stressors of life, and at this time, many of us are experiencing it more than usual. It's completely normal and okay to feel this way, but knowing how to reconnect with your inner peace in tougher times is one of the best tools you can have on your toolbelt.

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Resolutions Part 2: Setting Intentions for the New Year

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In my previous blog post, I discussed the importance of having a week or more of self-reflection in your meditation practice at the end of each year. December is the perfect time to look back, do a scan of how you're feeling about the outgoing year, both good and bad, and release what no longer serves you. This clears the way and frees you to set good intentions for the coming year. I love planning out my goals for the new year, both big and small. I hope you will join me in mapping out the near future!

During your meditations through the end of the year, I encourage you to take some time to scan this past year, month by month, and ask yourself the following questions:

What did I accomplish during this time that I am most proud of?

What did I set out to accomplish that didn't happen? Is that still a goal I plan to work towards over the course of the coming year?

Did I form any habits that I'd like to continue?

Are there any new habits I'd like to adopt over the course of the next year?

What do I wish to accomplish during the months ahead? What are the most important things I want to do?

While reflecting and setting patterns, maintain focus on the positive. Really *feel* that gratitude and happiness from any and all of your achievements over the last year. *Live* in each one to allow that gratitude to build within you.

Prioritize

As you organize these thoughts, I recommend making a priority list of the things you wish to accomplish over the next year. When I do this exercise, I list out any big accomplishments that I'm hoping for (which are generally things that are more out of my control or will take many steps to achieve) and any smaller accomplishments (which are generally things that I could do on my own). I look at each list and prioritize what I want to work towards. Sometimes, it helps to come up with a plan and schedule out the coming months, notating which accomplishments to work toward, and when. The more detailed I am when prioritizing these goals, the more it helps me to accomplish them. But everyone is different, so try and figure out what works best for you.

Setting intentions

Next, to set these intentions, I give them acknowledgment each and every day during my meditation practice, especially in this last period of the old year and the beginning of the new one. I list them out loud at least once a day, but more than that, I visualize how I will accomplish these things on my list, and what their outcome looks like, in detail. In other words, I spend a bit of time each day manifesting my goals. If my goal is finishing my book, I see myself in that moment the book is complete. I feel that jolt of excitement that will come once I know it has been completed. I smell the way the finished book will smell, and I feel myself holding it in my hand. On the other hand, I also see the steps that it may take to get to that finished product, which can help provide my more logical mind with clarity on how to get there. I do this for each of the things I wish to accomplish, seeing their outcome as a success. Visualizing your next year, the goals that you have, and the changes you wish to make in your life will help you to turn these goals into realities.

Setting patterns

As far as establishing patterns, perhaps, have you noticed that you're just a bit happier overall this year because you finally put aside 15 minutes a day to meditate, and you want to keep that pattern? Or, maybe you wish to meditate more, so you want to make that a pattern? Whatever pattern you'd like to set for yourself long term, it's important in your time of self-reflection to both acknowledge it and also see the good it will bring into your life. The best way to set lasting patterns for the new year is to continually visualize yourself completing the patterns while truly seeing the benefits that they will bring into

your life. If you can visualize the joy and gratitude it will bring you, the more motivated you will likely be to work towards something.

In the end, we are the masters of our own lives. We can create the world we want to live in one small step at a time, and the best way to begin living your best life is to actively work towards the small goals and set the patterns you'd like to have in your life. It really is that easy. So, during your reflection of 2022 and in your meditation practice in 2023, I hope you will focus on the ways **you can set intentions** that will continue to make your life happier and more fulfilling. Happy new year!

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Using Earth Core to Ground Yourself

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Let's talk about grounding! Being grounded basically means being present to the world around you, noticing what's happening in the moment, and being connected to the earth. Grounding is a topic I heard about over and over again back in theatre school, and it's also a recurring theme in meditation. You see, when you're meditating regularly, you can start becoming rather spacey if you're not taking care to reconnect with your surroundings after meditating. Personally, I enjoy conducting mindfulness exercises to root myself back down into physical reality after any truly powerful meditations. If I need to ground, I imagine roots coming out of my feet and into the earth, and I really feel that connection. Perhaps this is why learning about the Earth Core exercises in Exploration 27 is so helpful.

If you've attended Exploration 27, Starlines, or any other advanced programs at the Monroe Institute, you know what Earth Core is. For the purposes of this article, I will explain that it is a focus level that takes you deep into the earth's center to help you ground and reconnect. It's a fantastic tool to use after experiencing higher states of consciousness.

After attending a program at Monroe, I tend to feel like my head is in the clouds. The same occurs if I've been meditating extensively at home for a few days straight. As someone who has taken Exploration 27 and Starlines, I tend to do an exercise to connect myself with Earth Core after extended periods of meditation to ensure I am truly grounded. I see myself pulled deep within the earth's core, where I connect and feel part of this amazing planet that supports all life. When I find this connection, I use it to feel mindful of the world around me as I leave intense periods of practice behind.

But what if you haven't taken a program that has connected you with Earth Core yet? If that's the case, I can provide some advice that might help you connect deeply with the earth after extensive meditation. To connect with Earth Core is to ground yourself with the earth. So, if you're looking to be more grounded, the first thing I can recommend is taking a walk outside. As you step, feel your feet rooting deep into the earth. If it helps,

imagine roots growing out of your feet, going deep down like a tree, and feel the earth pulling back on your feet as you take each step forward. In this moment, practice mindfulness. See each color around you as you walk. See each leaf on every tree. Notice each bird or bug that flies by you. Really pay attention to the present and focus on seeing it. Then, focus on hearing it. What sounds are happening around you? Focus on each small background noise you may not have normally noticed, like the whistling wind making trees and plants rustle, or the sound of cars passing nearby. Being in the moment is one of my favorite ways to get and stay grounded.

If you're feeling the need to ground at any point, focus on Earth Core and meditate on that idea. If you don't quite connect to it yet, try the exercise I shared above. Being connected to the earth is the essence of grounding. Meditation is always about discovering what works best for you and incorporating those techniques into your own practice. Playful experimentation is a great attitude to maintain, and if you discover a method that works well for you and you use it, your life will reflect the benefits.

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The Many Pieces of Our I-There

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One of the things I love most about meditation is using it as a tool to learn more about myself, and part of this comes with collecting pieces of my I-There (my total self) that get scattered throughout various lifetimes, adventures and traumas. Part of an exceptional meditation program (or even an exercise) can be collecting parts of yourself that you have lost, allowing yourself to become whole once again. This is worth thinking about because, as humans, we are constantly evolving creatures. Who I was yesterday is not who I will be tomorrow, as factors constantly come and go, combining, changing and affecting me. But with meditation, I can collect lost pieces of myself, remember who I once was, and process the evolution of my overall being.

The part I love most about this is that, as humans, we are controversial and contradictory creatures. We are, truly and completely, walking contradictions. We can like two topics that contradict one another. We can be both rough around the edges and sweet and inviting depending on who we are talking to or the circumstances presented. So, while collecting pieces of who you once were in a meditation, it's possible to see that you are, in fact, contradicting your own nature. And that's to be expected.

And this contradiction found through collecting pieces of myself had never been more vivid to me than when I took [Starlines Virtual Retreat](#) at Monroe Institute. As we began to meditate initially on the ideas of space, I resonated with each of the planets and reclaimed parts of myself that had been scattered across the known universe. I used those pieces of myself to help me manifest a fuller picture of who I could be and how I could help in this lifetime and beyond, in a much larger context.

And throughout [this growth](#) and expansion—which came with a much larger perspective shift—my capacity to view many things at the same time shifted and evolved. And when I meditated with the intention to meet my I-There cluster, this widely shifted perspective on who I was on a greater scale demonstrated that contradiction. I could see so many energetic signatures around me, so many different colors, so many different pieces, some contradicting each other, some existing in harmony ... which really presented an articulate metaphor for who we are as beings.

Here is an excerpt from my meditation journal when I first connected with my cluster council:

The energetic signatures have transitioned to black and purple when looking a different way. I see so many people around me once again, all sending me their energy—my I-There. There seems to be a higher dark energy over my mind, a darker thicker representation of everything above me. And a beautiful Laniakea-looking flow of energy dancing around. A contradiction. A dark one and a light one. A dark cloud and a white shining light. I ask about my I-There cluster, and it says I have connected with many other clusters. My openness and willingness to connect with people is, or at least used to be, extreme. Now I am careful with who I let in, but there are new loves and energies in my life that are definitely part of my cluster. My love is a part of my soul, this is known. But there are other smaller pieces strewn about in those close to me.

In the end, all of these parts of me, whether or not they are contracting or compatible, seemed to represent the idea of a rainbow of light. Each piece of me represented a separate entity, a separate color in the spectrum of the rainbow. But like these colors, they also came together to form a bright white light, a representation of who my overall being is as a whole.

We can always use [perspective](#) to shift how we view the world, from the tiny atoms that make up our matter to the overall grand superclusters that make up our galaxy. And we are the same, metaphorically speaking, too. We are made up as bits and pieces, constantly evolving and learning and changing. I suggest that you check in with yourself each day, to recognize who you are and the life you're serving, to actively drop that which isn't serving you, and to allow yourself to change and evolve into something better and greater—even if it contradicts someone you once were.

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A Few Tricks I Personally Use to Move Between Focus Levels

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One of the things I love most about my meditation practice is, when I'm open to it, it becomes a constantly changing, ever-evolving experience in which I'm always learning new tricks. I feel that, when I'm ready for it, a new tool or technique will appear to help me take things to the next level. If I find that techniques stop working for me or become stale, I'm able to release them and make way for new practices. Meditation is an ever-changing, ever-evolving, sometimes looping experience, and I'm always excited to be on its constant adventure. My point here is simple: we all find and develop tricks that help us throughout our practices, and today, I'd love to talk about the tricks or hidden gems that I've found that help me move seamlessly and effortlessly among focus levels. For me, perhaps one of the greatest techniques I learned to seamlessly and effortlessly change focus levels came from Exploration 27 (X27), and I was able to practice and solidify it more when I took Starlines. In X27, you learn that there is a direct and easy pathway from Earth Core 27 to Focus 27, and you can practice a single breath technique to get you from one to the other. For me, once this clicked, it became essential for me to effortlessly flow among different levels of consciousness. Whenever I want to get from any focus level to another, it also helps me to visualize what that a focus level looks like to me and recall what it feels like there. The more you are familiar with these different levels, the easier it can be to simply recall them and go there. I feel this is the simplest way to get from one focus level to the next. Say I want to go to Focus 21. With a visualization of what that may look like to me in my mind and with a strong remembrance of what it feels like to be there, I simply breathe in and feel myself moving effortlessly to that level of consciousness. A single breath can be all it takes to shift when you are familiar enough with any expanded state. You will surely pick up other tools for yourself along the way as well. When I took Starlines recently, visual cues became very important to me. I could just see my special place in Focus 27 and, more specifically, a well that randomly appeared outside of it (specifically during Starlines). With a single breath, I would see myself there. I then began seeing this well as a portal to help me easily transition from one focus level to the next. It became a tool I could use to switch between focus levels.

Our minds are very creative places. When we spend the time we need with our thoughts, we can creatively develop a number of tricks in our practice—not just to bring us through an array of focus levels like I mentioned above, but to help with other things, as well. Perhaps there's a visualization trick that connects you with the Healing and Rejuvenation Center in Focus 27 when you are most in need of it. Perhaps you can just simply visualize something or feel a familiar feeling or even hear a certain sound that can instantly connect you with that healing energy. So, as you go about your practice and play and learn what works for you, I encourage you to pay attention to what stands out about each focus level visually, emotionally, and even auditorily, and see if you can utilize those distinct characteristics as a way to more easily connect with the benefits of each of these focus levels.

When I want to heal, I visualize what the Healing and Rejuvenation Center looks like to me and feel those healing energies, and suddenly, I am connected to that healing.

When I really need some alone time, I visualize my Special Place in 27, breathe in while visualizing it, and I am connected with my special energy there.

The sky is the limit, and the point of this blog, in a nutshell, is to remind you to continually be looking for these little tricks throughout your explorations into your own consciousness. Take these little pieces, find those hidden gems, and use them as you see fit. Incorporate them into your practice, and if they no longer serve you at some point, just let them go. Your meditation practice should be yours! It should be fun, and it shouldn't be stagnant, so simply drop anything that isn't helping you in the moment and move forward with the tools that do. Always remember to play or explore along the way!

